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THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF CAMEROON

Which are they?

How many are they?

Where are they spoken?

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This paper does not propose to give definite, let alone, incontrovertible answers to the above questions but while recognizing the problem and attempting to present it in all its magnitude and complexity, will content itself with indications to possible solutions; subsequently, it will give some elements of an answer albeit tentative, from our present state of research. One crucial question that, in my opinion, takes precedence over the other three because its solution constitutes a necessary input to the solution of the others is precisely: "What is Language?". It is to all these questions that this article will address itself.

By Cameroon indigenous languages we shall understand only those languages that are spoken natively by Cameroonian nationals; indigenous because native to some geographic region of the country. This excludes from discussion such languages as Igbo, Mbe etc. African languages which though spoken natively in Cameroon cannot be said to be native or indigenous to

* This paper is a revision of an earlier article yet unpublished. I am thankful to linguists in the field and my students who filled out the questionnaire addressed to them. My gratitude also goes to my close collaborators: R. Breton and Michel Dieu who at different points in time cross-checked the list and gave useful information.

Cameroon. This definition ipso facto excludes such languages as French, English, and Pidgin English. In other words, the indigenous languages here are Cameroon Home Languages used for intragroup or intergroup communication. (None of these has as yet attained either official status or national recognition).

The indigenous languages of Cameroon thus defined do not for that matter form a single linguistic family but rather a variety of phonological and grammatical types. Of the four major families into which Joseph Greenberg (1965) groups African languages: the Congo Kordofanian, the Nilo-Saharan, the Afro-Asiatic and the Khoisan, only the last of these is not attested in Cameroon. The Congo-Kordofanian, the largest of them in Cameroon is further subdivided into West Atlantic, Benue-Congo and Adamawa, (subsumed under Niger-Congo). The Benue-Congo subgroup comprises the Bantu languages: narrow Bantu and the Bantu Grassfield languages (Semi-Bantu). The Adamawa subgroup, the next largest, includes languages such as Fulfulde, Fali, Duru, Karang etc. with a myraid of dialectal variants, most of which, mutually unintelligible, spread throughout the northern region of the country. The Saharan is represented in Cameroon by the Kanuri which in turn groups a sizeable number of dialects. The Chari-Nile (also subgroup of the Saharan) is represented by languages such as the Laka, Sara, Ngambay etc while Semitic and Chadic (subgroups of the Afro-Asiatic) are represented respectively by Arab Choa, and Hausa, Mandara, Mora, Gamergu. This paper will not discuss the linguistic characteristics of any language or language

family.

Literature on the Cameroon language situation estimates that there would be well over two hundred languages⁽¹⁾ in the country for a population of 7, 663, 236 inhabitants.⁽²⁾ This, among other factors, makes of the country one of the most linguistically complex in Africa - justification *inter alia* for describing Cameroon as Africa in miniature. The recent sociolinguistic survey of Cameroon Urban Centres, indicated on first count only 93 languages (Chia: 1979). Although this does not reveal the whole linguistic picture of the entire country since the focus was only on urban centres, nevertheless, this figure is significant in view of the fact that the languages or dialects represented in towns are, to an extent, mirror images of the surrounding rural areas. However, on going research in the Department of African Languages and Linguistics (University of Yaounde) and DGRST (CREA) using methods such as mutual intelligibility testing measure of linguistic distance, further sociolinguistic survey into language use and function, though far from completion, gives one to think that there may not be as many as 120 standardizable languages in the country. A standardizable language is one which by virtue of its vitality: its wide range of usage, prestige, number and socio-economic dynamism

(1) In 1976, Prof. Mbassi-Manga estimates the figure to be upwards of 285 languages.

(2) "How Many Are We? Help Us Count You" April 1976 General Population and Housing Census.

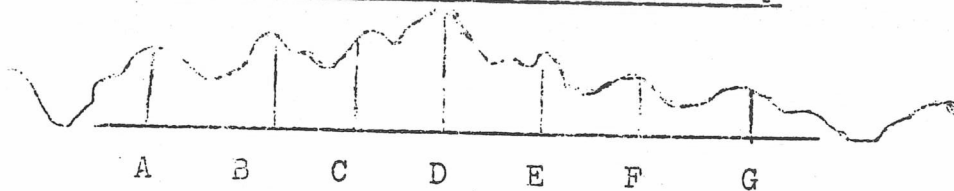
of its speakers etc, there is an impending need for it to be given a written form, a sort of supra-dialectal norm. Briefly speaking, a standardizable language is one that should be developed.

Language Vs Dialect

Most linguists would (in differing forms) tend to define a language as an internalized system of communication or code which enables its users to exchange ideas and messages by means of speech sounds. We would be in the presence of language each time any two (or more) people using the same code, spoke and understood themselves. Mutual intelligibility thus seems to be the main factor in the definition of language. However each language has a vast range of variation in the way its speakers use the language (no two people ever speaking in exactly identical manner). People from different regions of the same linguistic group will speak differently. Technically such differences are referred to as dialects - more precisely, regional dialects. Frequently however the layman uses the term dialect pejoratively sometimes to refer to one variant of the language as inferior and sometimes to refer even to a language as "primitive," as uncodified and unwritten. It is in this sense that most African languages are dubbed dialects in contrast to European languages. Perhaps it needs be emphasized that inspite of speaker/hearer

judgement, these are languages in their own right equally, elaborately and intricately structured, and equally complex if not more so than the so-called "civilized" languages. The problem that arises with respect to Cameroonian, African and other languages in similar complex situations is that in a geographically vast linguistic community, dialects of the same language will spread out from one end of the zone to the other, or from the centre of the region to the out-skirts in such a way that the dialects on the opposite extremes, by virtue of the spatial distance that separates them and the loss of contact that ensues, become mutually unintelligible. The simplified diagram below illustrates this:

Diagram I - Language Y Community.



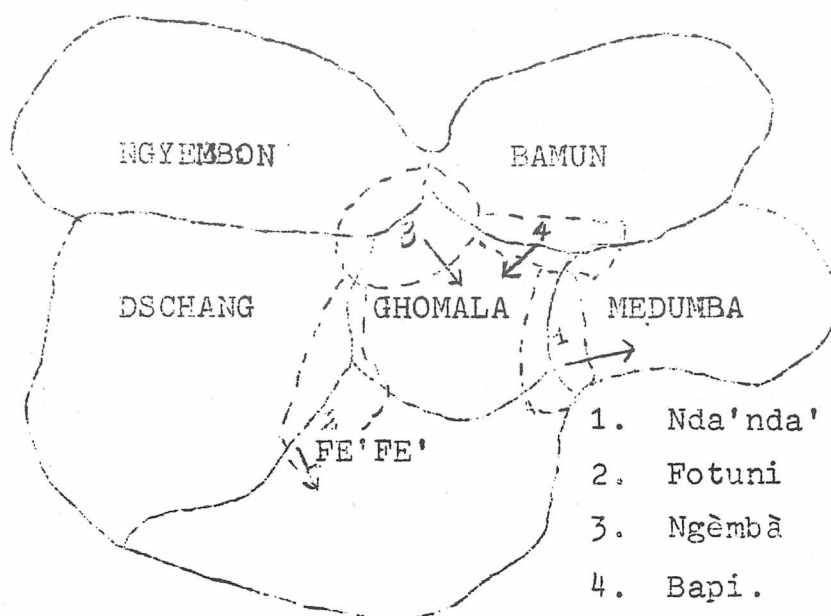
Languages Y has seven different dialects indicated above by different peaks A to G in a continuum. (A reasonably sharp break between one range and the next would mark a boundary between one language and the other). A is mutually intelligible with B, B with C, C with D and so on. The degree of mutual intelligibility between A and C is, of course, relatively lower than between A and B. But A is not mutually intelligible with G. Are these two extreme dialects languages?

If mutual intelligibility were the only factor, the question would be relatively easy. However, many other socio-political factors such as arbitrarily carving out a group of dialects into political and administrative units, come into play. (It should be noted, that these dialects or languages have previously been grouped together on genetic grounds as belonging to one stock (Greenberg, J. 1966, Guthrie M. 1967, Voorhoeve 1970, Welmers 1971)). Mutual intelligibility between all the dialects here is a matter of degree and nowhere does it fall below 10%. If the degree of mutual intelligibility between dialects A and B is higher than between A and the dominant dialect of Y's closest (left) neighbour, and if the same is true of D and Y's closest (right) neighbour, we would in the interest of on going or eventual standardization, group A and G as dialects of Y, not as autonomous languages. This solution finds more justification when these dialects are bounded by natural barriers and or fall within the same administrative unit with its headquarters in a major urban centre which then functions as a pole of attraction. However, the situation in the field is not always relatively so simple. Occasionally, along the frontiers other dialect nuclei develop to form language subgroups. A concrete example can be drawn from the Grassfield Bantu languages of the Western Province commonly referred to in the literature as Bamiléké. This cluster comprises more than fifty different dialects regrouped in this

study into five different language communities. These are Dschang, Ngyemboon, Ghomala, Fe'fe' and Medumba. Bamoun to the east could come in as the sixth but it is linguistically excluded from this cluster on genetic basis, though neighbouring Medumba speakers understand it with relative ease.

Diagram II below illustrate this grouping.

Diagram II: The Bamiléké Languages



The sub dialect nuclei straddling other language communities are numbered 1-4. The arrows indicate direction of attraction and consequently, the language communities in which they are regrouped. The linguistic continuum illustrated in diagram I could apply to any of the five groups individually and also to some extent, to the entire region. That is, if you move eastwards from say Bafang the divisional headquarters of Haut Nkam where Fe'fe' is the dominant norm, the dialects

become less and less intelligible with that spoken in the centre but more and more intelligible with those that flank the western border of Medumba community. Batcha, a dialect classed here under Fe'fe' is neither accepted by the Fe'fe' speakers as one of their dialects nor by the Medumba speakers though there is evidence of genetic relatedness. However, Batcha falls administratively under Fe'fe'. Besides, relative mutual intelligibility and the population of speakers regroup Fotuni with Fe'fe'; so also Ngèmba and Bapi fall with Ghomala, and Nda'nda' is regrouped with Medumba. They thus constitute subgroups under larger groups.

There is an element of arbitrariness that comes into play especially in so far as language or dialect names are concerned. In some cases such as Ghomala and Medumba for example, the language is a coinage from "I say" of the dominant prestigious dialect (eventually the standard). In other cases it is the name given by outsiders. This is the case with most language names that are suffixed with Ba - (the people of). In yet some cases the name of the language is that of the clan or ethnic group. But it must be noted that people of the same ethnic group may speak different languages either as a result of linguistic evolution in different directions, as a result of language death due to the dispersal of a whole tribe or due to conquest and subsequent domination of the conquerors

linguistic norm. As such ethnic name does not always correspond with language name.

On the other hand due to inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts people of the same origin and language may split and migrate distances into different linguistic communities. Even though they may maintain the same linguistic norm, the language they speak is given a different name. An example case is that of Finge which broke off from Kom in the early 19th century, went past Babanki (Kedjom) and settled in Bambili. Finge is about 95% mutually intelligible with Kom and of course is grouped as a dialect of Kom. Also, a language is not just a name since one and the same language may have two or more different names: Mungaka is also called Bali; Fulfuldé is called Fulani, Foulbe interchangeably. But there are also a few case where, by share coincidence, two different languages will have the same name. Bangwa, a language spoken in Manyu Division (South West Province) corresponds to a dialect of Medumba spoken in Nde Division (Western Province) and spelt in French "Bangoua".

Grouping of Dialects: Criteria used.

The single most important criteria for identifying languages during this survey (1976-78) - taking dialects which informants called languages for most of the time and

regrouping them, was mutual intelligibility as attested in the field. Some of the names collected were village names, divisional names, dialect names and in some cases, two or more names to one and same dialect or language. The total count of these names from the urban centres alone, came up to a staggering four hundred. The explanation as hinted above seems to be in part that in most of these languages the distinction between dialect and language does not exist. There is no name in the language for "dialect" as distinct from "language". It is enough for there to be a difference in the pronunciation of one and the same linguistic form (say a word) between speakers of adjacent villages and the informant will insist that he speaks a different language. Questions on mutual intelligibility went far but not all the way to clarify the situation. When these names were regrouped after the field work we came up with the total of 93 languages (indicated earlier in this paper). Linguistic distance, thanks to work previously done by Michel Dieu (CREA), was used to corroborate to a large extent mutual intelligibility attested by informants. It became evident during the workshop discussions that this grouping was pitted with many shortcomings. In the drive to refine the grouping a questionnaire was prepared (by the writer) entitled "Help us identify Cameroon Languages" and circulated to researchers in the field. The questionnaire had six columns for (1) Name of language or dialect,

(2) Alternative name of language, (3) Where spoken, (4) If dialect, mutually intelligible with what others, (5) If dialect, of what language and (6) Language family. The first column contained about 462 language names (those collected in the field plus those taken from CERELTRAL (now CREA) and S.I.L. libraries in Yaounde). The responses gathered from a little over 40 students and researchers in the field have helped to clarify the situation but it is far from perfect.

In addition to the criteria indicated earlier, the regrouping of dialects into languages in the list that follows has also been inspired by research work carried out by our students in the Department of African Languages and Linguistics (University of Yaounde). Chari Blama worked on the languages of the extreme north of the country; Domche Engelbert, on the Bamiléké dialects in Mifi division, regrouping them under Ghomala while Yameni Françoise further identified the subgroup - Ngèmba within the same unit. Tondji Simon focussed on Medumba, Domchié J. on the languages of Benoué and Adamawa divisions while Kathleen Phillips worked on the dialects of Yambeta. Sadembouo Etienne, using statistical methods, summarizes, categorizes and hierarchizes the criteria used by these students and other field workers, with the objective of eventual standardization of unwritten Cameroonian languages. He lists inter alia, established literary tradition in a dialect, socio-economic dynamism of the speakers,

government attitude, prestige and vehicularity of the dialect. References to these works are mentioned in the bibliography.

List of the indigenous Languages of Cameroon

An attempt has been made to update the grouping of dialects into languages and languages into sub-families and families. The following major families are presented:

1. Nilo-Saharan
2. Afro-Asiatic
3. Congo-Kordofanian.

Thus the numbering: 1.0, 1.2, 2.0 etc, represents these language families or language sub-families. The name of the language family is indicated immediately after the number.

A language (by our definition), name or label for a group of dialects, is written in the left hand column on this list in capital letters whereas dialectal variants are written in lower case under it. Parenthesis, unless otherwise explained, indicate alternative name of language or dialect. Language sub-groups are numbered (i), (ii), (iii) etc. The close to fifty dialects in the Western Province are as follows: Medumba 11, Ngyemboon 5, Dschang 9, Ghomala 15 and Fe'fe' 6 dialects. Ngemba and Nda'nda' are subgroups of Ghomala and Medumba respectively. To answer the questions:

"Which are the Cameroon home languages?

How many are they?"

it suffices for the reader to count the names in capital

letters on the left column.

The column on the right hand answers the last question, "where are these languages spoken?" This column gives in capital letters, the name of the division(s) in which the language directly to the left registers its greatest number of speakers. An attempt is also made to indicate more precisely in what subdivision (written in small letters) that language or dialect is situated. In many cases (especially in the Western Province) the name of the language or dialect corresponds to the name of the subdivision or village in which it is spoken.

LANGUAGE/Dialect	LOCALITY
1.0. Nilo-Saharan Family	
KANURI	MOYO SAVA
Sirata	Mora
Mwek	Guider
SARA	BENOUE
Ngambay	Tchollire
Luka	"
2.0. Afro-asiatic Family	
2.1. Semetic Branch	
ARABE CHOA	LOGONE ET CHARI
Arabic	Mora

2.2. Chadic Branch

HAUSA

KOTOKO

BACHAMA

Bata-Gwade

Bata-Jungun

DJIMI

Gude

Njegn

Bana

KAPSIKI

Higi

Margi

VALE

MABAS

HIDE

DABA (MAZAGWAY)

Hina

Kola

GIZIGA

Marva

MOKYO

MUYANG

MADA

ULDEME

MUYENGUE

MUKTELE

MAFA (MATAKAM)

Sirak

Idantsuy

Sulde

Mofele

Chuvok

MOFU

Mofu-Meri

Duvangar

MBOKU

ZULGO (SULZO)

Gemjeck

Mineo

NORTHERN URBAN CENTRES

LOGONE ET CHARI

BENOUE

Garoua

Poli

MARGUI WANDALA

Mokolo

Guider

Mokolo

MARGUI WANDALA

Mokolo

Mokolo

Mokolo

Mokolo

Mokolo

Guider

Mokolo

Maroua

DIAMARE, Maroua, Kaele,
Mindif, Meri

Mora

Mora

Mora

Mora

Mora

Mora

Mokolo

Mokolo

Mokolo

Mokolo

Mokolo

Mokolo

DIAMARE

Meri

Mokolo

Meri

Mora

Mora

Mokolo

GUIDAR

Lam
Guider (north)
Guider (south)
Bainawa
Batao

MANDARA (WANDALA)

Gamorgu
*Mora

GLAFDA (GALEBOA)

MUSGUM

Musujk
Kadai (Guirvidig)
Mugulna
Komo
Kormi
Mazuma
Puss

MASSA (MASSANA)

LAME

PEVE (ZIME)

MBREME

Hurza
Vame

TUPURI

Mata

BENOUE

Guider
Guider
Guider
Guider
Guider

MARGUI WANDALA

Mora
Mora

Mokolo

MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY
MAYO DANAY

Tchollire, BENOUE

MAYO DANAY

MARGUI WANDALA

Mora
Mora

Tchatibala, Kaele,
Mindif, MAYO SANAGA.

3.0. Niger-Congo (Congo-Kordofanian)

3.1. West-Atlantic
FULFULDE (FULANI)

3.2. Adamawa Ubangi
CHAMBA (SAMBA)
VERE (KOMA, KOB)A
VOKO
KUTIN
SEWE
DOAYO (NAMCHI)
BAPE
DURU
DUUPA (PANON)
KOLBILA
MONO
MUNDANG
MAMBAY
MBUM (KARANG)

NORTH & NORTH-WEST PROVINCES.

Poli, BENOUE
Poli, BENOUE
Poli, BENOUE
Tignère, Banyo, ADAMAMA
Poli
Poli
Poli, Garoua
Tchollire
Poli
Poli
Tchollire
Garoua, Kaele.
Garoua, BENOUE
Tchollire, Ngaoundere,
Batere Oya.

Mbuntiba
Mbere
Kali (Kare)
KEPERI
*GUEVE
*GALKE
NIAM-NIAM
FALI
Fali North (Ram)
Fali South (Mam)
Kangu
Tinguelin
GBAYA (BAJA)
Yangéré
Mandja
Bagando-Ngombe
BAKA
Babingi

BENOUE
ADAMAWA
Bertoua

Tignère, Banyo
BENOUE.
Guider
Garoua
Guider
Garoua
ADAMAWA, LOM ET DJEREM
Bertoua
Batouri
Batouri
Yokadouma
Moloundou

3.3.0.. Benu-Congo Branch

3.3.1. Inkunoid Sub-branch

MBEMBE

DONGA-MANTUNG

3.3.2. Cross-River Sub-branch

ISSANGELE
BOKI
KORUP

NDIAN, MEME
MANYU
NDIAN

3.3.3. Bantoid Sub-branch

ESIMBI
Tiv
MAMBILA
TIKAR (TIKARI)
Ntem
Nwanti
VUTE
Chere
Mvare-dugar
Mikiri
WAWA
KONDJA

MENCHUM
Akoaya, MANYU
Banyo, ADAMAWA
Banyo, Yoko
ADAMAWA
ADAMAWA
Yoko, Nanga Eboko, Bertoua
Mbalmayo
Banyo, ADAMAWA
"

3.4. Bantu

* Astericks refer to languages that are phasing out.

3.4.1. Ekoid-Bantu

EJAGHAM

Obang

Keaka

Etung

Manta

MANYU

"

"

"

"

3.4.2. Mamfe-Bantu

AYANG

Kenyang

Denya (Takamanda)

MANYU

"

"

MENKA

MOMO

3.5. Grassfields-Bantu

3.5.1. Ring Group

BUM

KOM

Ake

Mbesinaku

Finge

MME

AGHEM

Weh

Isu

Bu

BABANKI (KEDJOM)

NDOP

Babessi

Bamessing

Bangulan

Bamunka

Babungo

Bamali

Bambalang

Bali-gashu

Bali-kumbat

Bamukumbit

NSO (LAMNSO')

Oku

Fundong-MENCHUM

Fundong- MENCHUM

"

"

"

Wum-MENCHUM

Wum-MENCHUM

"

"

"

MEZAM

Ndop-MEZAM

"

"

"

"

"

"

"

"

"

"

"

BUI

"

3.5.2. Noni-fingom Group

FUNGOM

NONI

MESAJE

BEFANG

NGWAW

Ngwo

Konda

Bassa

Ekweri

Banya

AMASSI

Akoaya

Assumbo

BONKENG

MENCHUM

BUI

NDONGA-MANTUNG

MENCHUM

MOMO

"

"

"

"

"

MANYU

"

"

Loum

3.5.3. Momo-Group

MOGHAMO

Widekum

Oshie

Menomo

Meta

Batibo

Ashong

Bafochu

Bamimbu

Babadju

Banjah

NGIE

MOMO

"

"

"

"

"

"

MEZAM

"

"

"

MOM

3.5.4. Mbam-Nkam

MFUMTE

Kwadjia

Koffa

Lus

Kom

Mbepji

Adere

YAMBA

LIMBUM

NGEMBA (NW)

Mankon

Awing

Nwa-DONGA MANTUNG

"

"

"

"

"

"

"

"

MEZAM

"

"

Bafut	MEZAM
Pinyin	"
Bagham	"
Akum	"
Bambui	"
Nkwen	"
Santa	"
Mindankwe	"
Bamendum	"
NUN	
Mungaka (Bali)	Bali-MEZAM
Bamun	Bamoun-NOUN
Baba I	MEZAM
NGYEMBOONG	BAMBOUTOS
Bamendjida	"
Bamiso	"
Mbunda	"
Balessing	"
Bacham	"
GHOMALA	MIFI
(i) Bafussam	"
Baham	"
Baleng	"
Bandenkop	"
Bandjun	"
Bapi	"
Batie	"
Batufam	"
Bayangam	"
Bahuan	"
(ii) Ngemba Sub-group	MIFI, BAMBOUTOS
Bamungum	"
Bamendju	"
Bansoa	"
Baneka	"
Bafunda	"
ATSANG (DSCHANG)	MENOUA
Bamock	"
Foto	"
Fomopea	"
Bafu	"
Bangang	"
Menua	"
Bamendji	"
Bangwa	MANYU
FE' EFE' E	HAUT-NKAM, NKAM
Bana	"

Fotuni	HAUT-NKAM, NKAM
Balafi	"
Bacha	"
Fondjomekwet	"
MEDUMBA	NDE, MBAM
(i) Bangante	"
Tonga	"
Bahok	"
Badunga	"
(ii) Sub-group Nda'nda'	NDE
Bangwa	"
Bangu	"
Bazu	"
Bamena	"
Batchingu	"
Balengu	"
3.6.0. Narrow Bantu (Zone A).	
BAKWERI	FAKO
Bamboko	"
Isubu	"
Mboko-Limba	"
Worea	"
3.6.1. Bantu Zone A 40	
KRIBI	OCEAN
Batanga	"
Bapuku	"
Banoh	"
Tanga-Yassa	"
BASAA	SANAGA-MARITIME, NKAM
Mbènè	"
Babimbi	"
Yabassi	"
Bakem	"
Ndokpenda	"
Dibum	"
BAKOKO	SANAGA-MARITIME, WOURI, MUNGO
Log-Mpo	"
Basso	"
Yakalak	"
BAROMBI	MEME
BANEN (ALINGA)	MBAM
NYOKON	Ndikinimeki-MBAM
LEMANDE	Bokito
DJANTI	Yoko
BANDEM	MBAM

BAFIA (RIKPA)	MBAM
BALOM	"
YAMBETA	Ndikinimeki-MBAM
Nedek	MBAM
Nigii	"
Nibum	"
GUNU	Ombessa-MBAM
Assala	Ntui
Gefige	"
Yambassa	MBAM (Ombessa, Bokito)
Yangben	"
Mmala	"
TUKI	MBAM
Ngoro	"
Kombe	"
Bati	Ntui (Nbangasina)
Tsinga	"
Betsinga	"
Leti	"
TUNEN	MBAM
BAPE	Bafia-NDIKI
MANDI	"
BONEK	Bokito-NDIKI
FANG-BETI	MEFOU
(i)Ewondo	OCEAN
Evuzok	Lolodorf
Enoah	Mbalmayo
Bane	LEKIE
(ii)Eton	"
Mangissa	Esse
(iii)Nvele	Ayos
Yebckolo	Akonolinga
Yegono	
Yelinda	Akonolinga
Yembana	Ayos
Omvang	Nanga-Eboko
Yekaba	
Yebekanga	Akonolinga
Yezum	Nanga-Eboko
Yangafuk	Ntui
(iv)Mbida-Mbani	
Mvog-méngue	Akonolinga
(v) Bulu	Ebolowa, Sangmelima
(vi)Fang (Ntumu)	Djoum
Mvae	Gabon Frontier
(vii)Bobilis	" "

Zaman
Bamvele
Nanga Eboko
Bafeuk (Bawok)
Asong

Lomié
Nanga Eboko
Yoko, MBAM

3.6.2. Bantu Zone A

3.6.2.1. Lundu Group

OROKO

Isangele
Bakundu
Balue
Balundu
Ngolo-Bantanga
Mbonge
Balong
Bafaw

NDIAN

"
"
"
"
"

MEME

"
"

3.6.2.2. Mbo-Group

BAKOSSI

Bassossi
Bakaka
Baneka
Elung
? Ninong
Monamenam
Ngemingu
Mbo

Tombel - MEME

"
"
"
"

Bangeme MEME ?
MOUNGO

MEME
MOUNGO, HAUT-NKAM

3.6.3. Duala Group

DUALA

Pongo
Ewodi
Balimba
Bodiman
Abo
Wuki

WOURI, MUNGO
MOUNGO
WOURI, NKAM
WOURI, SANAGA MARITIME
MUNGO, FAKO
MUNGO
NKAM

3.6.4. Group A 80

MAKA

Mabéa
Mvumbo (Ngumba)
Bagyeli

Abongbang HAUT-NKAM
"

Lolodorf OCEAN
OCEAN Bipindi-Lolodorf

DJEM	Abongbang, Lomié
Dzimu (Nzimu)	Lomié
Essel	Moloundou
Badjue	Mesamena, Abongbang
MZDJIME	Batouri
Bangantu (East)	"
BIKELE	Yokadouma
KONABEMBE	"
BIDJUKI (MBIMU)	"
MBOMBO	"
SSO	Akonolinga

3.6.5. Group A 90

KAKA	KADEI, Batouri
BAKUM	Doumé
POL	"
Mbethen	"

In terms of vehicularity, over 90% of these languages (according to the sociolinguistic survey cited earlier) only serve as a means of intragroup interaction. Only Fulfulde which has dug deep into other provinces of the nation comes close to Pidgin English in terms of vehicularity.

The above list does not say anything about the numerical strength of each language. It is regrettable that at the present stage of our research we only possess vague and fragmentary information on some of the languages. As such, the statements we make are only tentative statistical approximations. For example, there would be about 20 languages on the above list with less than 10.000 speakers each, 35 languages with between 10.000 to 50.000 speakers each, another 35 with

between 50.000 to 100.000 speakers and finally a little less than 20 languages with more than 100.000 speakers each.

If we agree to define a major language within our context as one with more than 100.000 speakers, then, according to an unpublished working paper by Tadadjeu Maurice (May 1981), there would be about 15 of such languages in Cameroon. These languages are presented according to Province on the following table:

Major languages of Cameroon by Province

Province	!	Language	!	Population of speakers
Northern Province	!	Fulfulde	!	600.000
	!	Mafa	!	140.000
	!	Tupuri	!	140.000
Centre South P.	!	Beti	!	500.000
Littoral Province	!	Bassa	!	230.000
North West Province	!	Widekum	!	220.000
	!	Kom	!	130.000
	!	Ngemba	!	107.000
	!	Lamso'	!	100.000
Western Province	!	Ghomala	!	230.000
	!	Dschang	!	200.000
	!	Bamum	!	194.000
	!	Fe'fe'	!	130.000
	!	Medumba	!	110.000
	!	Ngyemboon	!	100.000
South West P.	!	-	!	-
Eastern Province	!	-	!	-

The blanks indicate that the province in question does not possess a major language.

One cannot over emphasis the tentative nature of some of the findings in this paper. The purpose of this paper therefore has been to create an awareness to the language problem in Cameroon and to indicate what attempts are being made to light up the thick cloud that has hitherto loomed in this area.

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